

Remarks

The present amendment is being filed in response to an Official Action mailed on December 2, 2003. A petition for a one-month extension of time and authorization to charge Deposit Account No. 50-1058 for the small entity fee for this extension accompany this response. In the Official Action, claims 74-108 were withdrawn from consideration, and claims 26-30 and 109-111 were rejected. Specifically, claims 26-30, 109, 111 and 112 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) over Miller, U.S. Patent No. 5,202,825 ("Miller"). Claims 26-30 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(e) over Artino, U.S. Patent No. 6,328,208 ("Artino"). Claims 109-112 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) over Artino. Claim 110 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) over Miller. In response to the Official Action, claims 26-28 and 30 have been amended to be more clear and distinct, claims 74-108 have been canceled, and new claims 113-120 have been added. Claims 26-30 and 109-120 are pending.

It is believed that claims 26-30 and 109-120 are allowable over the art of record for the reasons set forth below. Following a brief summary of the invention to provide context, each of the grounds of rejection are addressed in turn.

The Present Invention

The present invention provides an improved electronic safe system suitable for use in a retail store. As discussed in the specification, prior art electronic drop safes in retail stores suffer from a number of disadvantages. These disadvantages include inefficient handling and reporting of cash and non-cash deposits, difficulties in properly identifying a person making deposits, and difficulties in providing updates to the safes. These and other shortcomings of prior art systems

have resulted in an inefficient use of employee time, as well as security issues arising from theft and mishandling of deposits, both by employees and by third parties.

An aspect of the present invention addresses these and other issues by providing an electronic safe system in which a wireless network is used to connect a plurality of electronic drop safes into a local area network. Each safe in the network includes a controller and a bill acceptor interfacing with the controller. According to an aspect of the invention, at least one of the bill acceptor and the controller is updatable through the wireless network. According to a further aspect of the invention, the local area network includes a communications node that allows the local area network to communicate with an off site host system.

As set forth in the specification, these and other aspects of the invention address various issues raised by the prior art. For example, the use of a bill acceptor allows for increased efficiency in the handling and security of different types of deposits. Among other things, the use of bill acceptors allows electronic verification of currency being deposited, as opposed to manually entering the value of transactions. The use of a wireless network allows remotely located electronic safes to be networked together in a facility, while eliminating the need for wiring within the facility. Further, the wireless network allows a remotely located electronic safe to be updatable without interrupting the use of that safe, the expense of a service call by a trained service technician, or the like. The communications node in the local area network allows the safes in the network to be administered by an off site host, and further allows local area networks of electronic safes to be networked together as part of a wide area network. The wide area network can be used to provide both data exchange as well as program memory updates.

An electronic safe system according to the present invention realizes significant cost savings over prior art systems that require the installation of network wiring. In addition, the

quality and reliability of the system is improved as the number of mechanical interconnects is reduced. Also, the security of the system is increased as there is no wiring that can be accessed by vandals or thieves.

As discussed below, a number of aspects of the present invention as presently claimed are not taught and are not suggested by the prior art of record.

Cancellation of Claims 74-108

Previously presented claims 74-108 have been withdrawn from consideration, pursuant to an election requirement. In order to expedite the prosecution of the present application, these claims have been canceled without prejudice by the present amendment. Applicant, however, reserves the right to file a divisional application in the future directed to the subject matter of canceled claims 74-108.

Rejection of Claims 26-30, 109, 111 and 112 over Miller

Claims 26-30, 109, 111 and 112 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) over Miller. It is believed that these claims are allowable over Miller in light of the amendments to the claims and further in light of the following discussion.

First, it is respectfully asserted that the Official Action is incorrect when it states that Miller discloses a plurality of "safes 40." Rather, element 40 of the Miller system refers to a "customer service station" (col. 6, lines 19). These customer service stations are essentially portable cashier stations, which include a credit card reader, receipt printer, cash drawer, keyboard, readout and bar code reader (col. 2, lines 66-69; col. 3, lines 1-4).

A cashier station is fundamentally different from an electronic drop safe. A cashier station is used by a store employee to process purchases at a retail store. The employee typically needs continuous access to the cash contents of the station, both in order to place cash into the station, and also to remove cash in order to make change. Thus, as shown in Fig. 2 of Miller, each cash station includes a cash drawer 43. Also, typically, the contents of a cash drawer at a cashier station is removed from the cashier station each time there is a change in the employee operating the cashier station. Thus, a cash drawer is typically emptied several times each work day.

Further, Miller does not teach and does not suggest the use of a bill acceptor. Because an employee operating a cashier station requires continuous access to the contents of the cash drawer, it is impractical to use a bill acceptor in which bills are accepted and then stacked in conjunction with the cashier station. Further, the use of a wireless network in Miller is limited to the operation of a cashier station. The updates supplied by Miller's wireless network are price updates, that is, updates relating to the prices of products being purchased by a consumer at the cashier station. The information being communicated in the Miller invention is restricted to data concerning the products being bought (col. 11, lines 20-25). In the presently claimed invention, in addition to transmitting data, the wireless network is used to transmit program memory, including the firmware of the safe controller and the algorithms for bill acceptance.

Claim 26, as amended, is directed to an electronic safe system comprising a plurality of electronic safes located within a local area. A wireless network connects the plurality of safes into a local area network. Each safe in the network includes a controller and a bill acceptor interfacing with the controller. At least one of the bill acceptor and the controller is updatable through the wireless network.

Miller does not teach and does not suggest the system described by claim 26. As discussed above, the Miller system does not include a bill acceptor a drop safe controller that is updatable over a wireless network. It is therefore asserted that claim 26 is allowable over Miller.

Claim 27 depends from claim 26, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the local area network includes a communications node for providing wireless communications to an off site host system. As described in the specification, this communications node allows a plurality of networked electronic safes to be effectively administered by an off site host system. Miller does not teach and does not suggest access or control beyond the local environment for the portable cash stations. Thus, it is asserted that claim 27 is allowable, both for the reasons advanced above in support of claim 26 and further on the basis of its added limitations.

Claim 28 depends from claim 27, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the off site host system remotely monitors the plurality of electronic drop safes in the local area network. It is therefore asserted that claim 28 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claims 26 and 27 and further on the basis of its added limitations.

Claim 29 depends from claim 27, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the communications node comprises a wireless modem. It is therefore asserted that claim 28 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claims 26 and 27 and further on the basis of its added limitations.

Claim 30 depends from claim 26, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the local area network of electronic safes is connected to an external network. Miller does not teach and does not suggest the multi-layered networking capabilities

described by claim 30. As described in the specification, the use of the wireless local area network in conjunction with a wide area network provides safes with the ability to communicate across both the local area network and the wide area network. This multi-layered networking serves a number of different useful functions, including allowing money to be tracked, and coordinating collections and bank deposits. It is therefore asserted that claim 30 is allowable over Miller for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claims 26 and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 109 depends from claim 26, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the plurality of electronic safes receives currency data updates through the wireless network. It is therefore asserted that claim 109 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claim 26 and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 111 depends from claim 109, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the currency data updates include data relating to new currency. It is therefore asserted that claim 111 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claims 26 and 109 and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 112 depends from claim 27, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the host system provides currency data updates to the plurality of electronic safes through the wireless network. It is therefore asserted that claim 112 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claims 26 and 27 and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Rejection of Claims 26-30 over Artino

Claims 26-30 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(e) over Artino, which is directed to a night depository. Artino is directed to an after hours ATM-type depository. An after hours depository is fundamentally different from an electronic drop safe in a number of important respects. First, in an after hours depository, deposits are typically made in relatively large amounts at relatively infrequent intervals. For example, a typical deposit in an after hours depository may be a retail business's entire day's receipts. In a typical retail drop safe, on the other hand, deposits are made continuously, in relatively small amounts as transactions occur.

A second key difference between an after hours depository and a drop safe is that at an after hours depository, deposits are typically made by customers who are not employees of the financial institution providing the after hours depository. In the case of a retail drop safe, on the other hand, deposits are typically made by store employees.

A bill acceptor is not suited for use at a typical after hours depository where a customer wants to deposit a large sum of money in a bag quickly. One can well imagine that late at night a typical depository customer does not have the time or the desire to insert bills one at a time into a bill acceptor which then checks their denomination.

Consequently, it is not surprising that Artino does not teach and does not suggest a bill acceptor. Instead, deposits are received into Artino's depository through a rotating drum 48, shown in Artino's Fig. 2. The drum 48 includes pockets 50 that are sized for accepting deposits in the form of bags, sacks, envelopes, containers, or the like. Artino, col. 6, lines 61-14. Since Artino does not teach or suggest a bill acceptor, it does not teach or suggest a bill acceptor that is updatable through a wireless network.

As discussed above, claim 26, as amended, is directed to an electronic safe system comprising a plurality of electronic safes located within a local area. A wireless network connects the plurality of safes into a local area network. Each safe in the network includes a controller and a bill acceptor interfacing with the controller. At least one of the controller and the bill acceptor is updatable through the local area network. Artino does not teach and does not suggest the system claimed by claim 26. Specifically, Artino does not teach and does not suggest a bill acceptor that is updatable over a wireless network. Thus, it is asserted that claim 26 is allowable over Artino.

Claim 27 depends from claim 26, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the local area network includes a communications node for providing wireless communications to an off site host system. As described in the specification, this communications node allows a plurality of networked electronic safes to be effectively administered by an off site host system. It is asserted that claim 27 is allowable, both for the reasons advanced above in support of claim 26 and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 28 depends from claim 27, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the off site host system remotely monitors the plurality of electronic safes in the local area network. It is therefore asserted that claim 28 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claims 26 and 27 and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 29 depends from claim 27, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the communications node comprises a wireless modem. It is therefore asserted that claim 28 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claims 26 and 27 and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 30 depends from claim 26, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the local area network of electronic safes is connected to an external network. It is therefore asserted that claim 30 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claims 26 and further on the basis of the added limitations.

It is therefore asserted the claims 26-30 are allowable over Artino.

Rejection of Claims 109-112 over Artino

Claims 109-112 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) over Artino.

Claim 109 depends from claim 26, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the plurality of electronic safes receives currency data updates through the wireless network. It is therefore asserted that claim 109 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claim 26 and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 110 depends from claim 109, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the currency data includes counterfeiting data. It is therefore asserted that claim 110 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claim 26 and 109, and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 111 depends from claim 109, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the currency data updates include data relating to new currency. It is therefore asserted that claim 111 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claims 26 and 109 and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 112 depends from claim 27, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the host system provides currency data updates to the plurality of electronic safes through the wireless network. It is therefore asserted that claim 112 is allowable

for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claims 26 and 27 and further on the basis of the added limitations.

It is therefore asserted that claims 109-112 are allowable over Artino.

Rejection of Claim 110 over Miller

Claim 110 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) over Miller. Claim 110 depends from claim 109, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the currency data includes counterfeiting data. It is therefore asserted that claim 110 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claim 26 and 109, and further on the basis of the added limitations.

New Claims 113-120

Claim 113 depends from claim 26, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation at least one safe in the local area network receives, through the wireless network, firmware updates to the safe's controller. It is therefore asserted that claim 113 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claim 26, and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 114 depends from claim 26, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that each safe in the local area network receives, through the wireless network, algorithm updates for bill acceptance. It is therefore asserted that claim 114 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claim 26, and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 115 depends from claim 26, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that each safe in the local area network further includes a user interface for receiving inputs from a user of the safe. It is therefore asserted that claim 115 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claim 26, and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 116 depends from claim 115, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the user interface includes means for automatically identifying a user of the safe. It is therefore asserted that claim 116 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claims 26 and 115, and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 117 depends from claim 116, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the means for automatically identifying a user of the safe comprises a radio frequency identification tag antenna. It is therefore asserted that claim 117 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claim 26, 115 and 116 and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 118 depends from claim 115, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the user interface includes an optical interface for optically communicating with a personal digital assistant. It is therefore asserted that claim 118 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claim 26 and 115, and further on the basis of the added limitations.

Claim 119 depends from claim 26, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that the electronic safe system is networked with at least one other locally networked electronic safe system over a wide area through a second, independent wireless

network. It is therefore asserted that claim 119 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claim 26, and further on the basis of the added limitations.

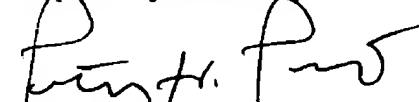
Claim 120 depends from claim 119, incorporating all of the limitations thereof and adding thereto the limitation that one of the electronic safes in the local area network functions as a local host capable of communicating over both the local area network and the wide area network. It is therefore asserted that claim 113 is allowable for the reasons advanced above in support of the patentability of claim 26, and further on the basis of the added limitations.

It is therefore asserted that new claims 113-120 are allowable over Miller and Artino.

Conclusion

For the above reasons, it is asserted that claims 26-30 and 109-120 are allowable over the art of record. It is therefore requested that the application be allowed. If any issues remain after consideration of the present submission, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned to address those issues.

Respectfully submitted,



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